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SUBJECT: SOMALIA-- TALKING POINTS FOR MARCH 20 OPEN DEBATE

¶1. This is an action message. See paragraph 2. USUN is instructed to draw from the following talking points for their March 20 open debate on Somalia.

Begin points:

-- The United States would like to thank the Secretary General for his thorough March 14 report on the situation in Somalia, which included the UN's Strategic Assessment of Somalia and contingency plans for a possible United Nations peacekeeping operation.

-- The United States agrees -- as the United Nations outlined in the Strategic Assessment of Somalia -- that it is important for the political, security, and programmatic efforts of the UN and the international community to be coordinated and well organized.

-- With that in mind, I would like to discuss these three tracks.

-- First, on the political track, the United States fully supports the efforts of the Somali Prime Minister Nur "Adde" Hassan Hussein and of the Special Representative of the Secretary General Ahmedou Ould Abdallah to reach out to talk to members of the opposition. It is extremely important, in the spirit of reconciliation, that members of the legitimate opposition be brought into the decision making process of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

-- The large-scale peace conferences held inside Somalia, such as the National Reconciliation Congress in July-August 2007, and outside Somalia, such as the Somalia National Reconciliation Conference that ended with the formation of the TFG and adoption of the Transitional Federal Charter in 2004, provide the way forward. Further dialogue must be focused on achieving the mandate of the transitional process outlined by the Charter, not on a new formal agreement or re-opening the already agreed-upon political framework.

-- At the same time, it must be stressed that there is no place at the table for spoilers and those who refuse to renounce violence. Al-Shabaab is one such group. On February 29, the United States designated al-Shabaab as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act) and as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entity (under Section 1(b) of Executive Order 13224). This designation was made in recognition of the terrorist threat posed by al-Shabaab to international stability and the group's determination to pursue a path of violence at the expense of dialogue, including the use of intimidation and targeted assassinations.

-- The United States fully supports efforts to relocate the UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) and other essential members of the UN Country Team from Nairobi to Mogadishu as laid out in Scenario 2 of the UN contingency plan, in Annex III of the SYG report. The United States understands that at present the security situation does not allow for this deployment. However, we encourage the UN to start making arrangements now for the relocation of UNPOS and other elements of the UN Country team to Mogadishu, including the development of appropriate security arrangements.

-- Second, on the security track, the United States agrees with the UN contingency planning report that there is no viable Somali solution to replace AMISOM in the near to medium term. To help stabilize Somalia and create the dynamics for lasting peace and stability, the international community must double and triple its efforts to bolster deployment and maintenance of AMISOM. We are aware, as the UN contingency planning report points out in its last paragraph, that many feel the voluntary basis of AMISOM's budget support is hampering AMISOM efforts to recruit and deploy forces. However, there is currently no alternative to this system. As we have said repeatedly, the United States cannot support the funding of non-UN missions through UN assessed contributions. We renew our call on the international community to provide greater financial and logistical support for AMISOM immediately to facilitate deployment of troop contributing countries that require additional funding guarantees and to help ensure the success of this critical mission. We also would like to thank once again the AU forces from Uganda and Burundi currently deployed to Somalia for their tireless efforts, often in the face of danger, to bring peace and stability to Somalia.

-- The United States was intrigued by the recommendation of a maritime task force referenced in Scenario 1 of the contingency planning. The United States previously approached Security Council members and other interested parties about the need to combat piracy and other maritime crime in and around Somali Territorial Waters. We note the February 27 letter from the TFG to the UNSC asking for assistance in combating piracy in its territorial waters. We look forward to working with the Council in the coming weeks to determine how best the UN Security Council can assist the TFG in stopping piracy off its coasts.

-- Third, on the programmatic efforts, we support the idea outlined in the strategic assessment for the formulation of a joint planning unit that could coordinate an integrated strategy. However, we emphasize the need to maintain the neutrality of UN humanitarian operations in any enhanced coordination mechanisms among UN programmatic activities.

-- In conclusion, the United States appreciates the effort and analysis reflected in the latest SYG report, including the Strategic Assessment Mission and the UN Contingency Planning Report. We also appreciate the continued efforts of SRSG Ould-Abdallah in working with the TFG to reach out and facilitate dialogue with members of the legitimate opposition. As we continue to encourage a process of peaceful political dialogue, we will also seek to isolate those who, out of extremism, refuse to engage in that dialogue and insist on violence. We look forward to continued close cooperation with the UN and our Security Council partners as we work towards lasting peace and stability in Somalia.

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